An Original DRAWING and STORY

By Robert Savery

INTO A VEIL OF MISTY BLUE THE MIGHTY EAGLE PLUNGED

TO all the lovers of the outdoors the sight of an eagle in the sky is ample reward for a long journey, for the King of Birds is seldom seen where large, populated areas have been created by the march of progress.

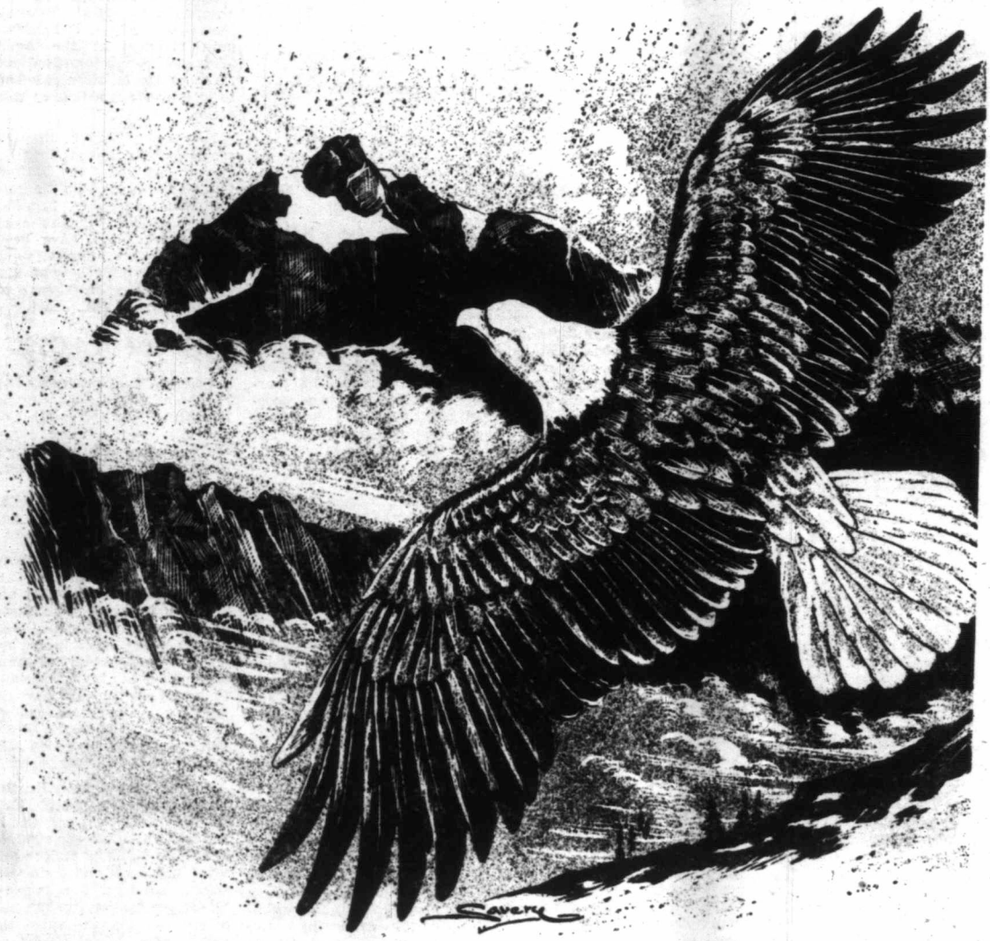
Now one must go to the towering mountain slopes above deep valleys where space is measured in thousands of feet in depth, or to the wild sea coast, where the everlasting song of the wind and crashing roar of the breakers has an affinity to the harsh call of an old white head, sweeping in wide circles as he soars into the infinity of blue or oyster grey.

In the days before man-made flight, it was a magical thing to see this great bird rising on the upcurrents of air, until all sight of him was lost in the mists of space. How many men wondered what the powerful eyes saw from on high, as the great bird, rushing with swift, strong strokes of his pinions gained sufficient speed to continue for a space sailing on and upward on stiff, widely extended wings, along the road of the sky.

So I saw one, wings wide, head capped as with snow against the sky, moving across the changing white cloud shapes.

Here were three accents to intensify sky color. The brilliant white of the great bird; below, the cold, hard white of the alpine snow field mounting to the peaks; and behind all, the billowing white clouds against the blue immensity. Cloudscapes are perhaps the most beautiful of compositions in nature and often the least regarded.

Climbing on the slopes of Mt. Baker in August the air was thin with an intoxicating quality as I passed the 5,000-foot level. Above, bright, clear sunlight bathed the peaks. It was then a shadow passing caused me to look up to where a whitehead was lazily forming giant figure eights with apparent pleasure. He must have been 200 feet above me and mounting with every majestic volplane to even higher air currents. Watching him through my glasses I could see his head move as the fierce eyes scanned the depths of the wilderness, and knowing this penetrating vision, one could assume there was nothing moving below that would miss examination.



Suddenly a rush of wind from the snow plateau of Shuksan caught him, and tossed him aloft without effort, then for the moment he hovered with snowy tail widespread and white head on down-bent neck, shining in the sun. The broad wings extended to their full extent, appeared no longer dark brown or black, but a lighter, almost translucent brown, tinged with gold.

While I watched, the great bird heeled off slightly toward the wind and then started to plane downward to the valley, a well of misty blue haze far below me.

Faster, faster, became his speed, so that I had difficulty to keep him in view. Then checking his breakneck descent, he changed his course, for, catching an updraft, his tremendous speed hurled him high in wide, sweeping circles, higher and higher, now caught by the sun as a glistening speck, now a mere dim spot upon the vast face of the sky.

However, my glasses still held him in focus as he swept across the great, outstretched coll of Shuksan above the snowfield and only then did I realize to what a vast height the great bird had risen and in only a few moments.

Still he seemed to be rising and now although small in my lenses there was yet a royal beauty about him as he spiralled above the aged head of the mountain. Little wonder that man throughout the ages from Aristophanes on, attributed magic powers to the eagles and called them messengers of the gods.

Perhaps similar impressions caused the proud chieftains of continental Europe in a bygone day to select the blazon of the eagle, black, white or gold, and I like to think that in some far off day the men of Ithaca watched the golden brother of my whitehead spiral into the infinite blue above Olympus as I had watched the baldhead over Shuksan. Then it seemed to me, and seems to me still, one of the unforgettable and very splendid pictures of wild life.